

ised as was England at that time, when a labour war had been in process for a generation, and the strikers were going round from village to village, plotting and preparing the great rebellion of 1381.

But it is false to suppose that, because the religious houses were bound to distribute alms liberally, they were popular with their neighbours and tenants. Monasteries, being corporate bodies, were more conservative and more tenacious of old rights than ordinary landlords, lay and clerical. The old manor system, based on villenage and the servitude of the tenants, generally lasted longer on estates belonging to the religious houses than on those managed by private persons. In the Peasants' Rising, great abbeys like Chester, Bury, and Peterborough were attacked with the fiercest hatred by their serfs. The chronicler of St. Albans himself tells what happened to his monastery in 1381. The * slaves' and 'villeins' of the abbey—that is to say, the inhabitants of the town that lay at its feet—formed the iniquitous design of becoming 'burghers' and * citizens.' The news of the success of the rebels in London gave them courage to make the attempt. Their friends in the capital extorted from the King, who was still in great terror of Wat Tyler's bands, a letter to the Abbot ordering him to grant the requisite charters to the * burgesses and good men * of St. Albans. Armed with this letter they burst into the monastery. After long hesitation and many shifts, the Abbot was forced by the rioters to grant them what they asked; the obnoxious rights and monopolies were all surrendered; the townsfolk broke up and carried off in triumph the millstones which had been placed in the cloister to witness that none might grind his corn save at the abbey mill. But the despair of the monks and the joy of their neighbours were soon reversed. The Kentish rebels evacuated London, and the King went round with his army and his chief justice on a bloody assize. He came to the monastery in person, and judged the quarrel on the spot. All the old privileges were restored to the monks; their tenants, freeman and serf, were compelled to render their services as before; fifteen of those who had striven not wisely but too well to